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LITHOGRAPHY



ST. JEAN A THIERS
BY EUGENE ISABEY

T. Fisher Unwin,)

LITHOGRAPHY

WHAT Mr. Joseph Pennell does not know about lithography is—to use an Americanism—not worth knowing. In his double capacity as artist and art-critic he is eminently fitted for the task of recording the history of any branch of black and white art, especially as he has taken a leading part in the movement which has placed England at the head of the nations as regards black and white illustration. Moreover, he is a practical lithographer, and has mastered all the technicalities

of a craft which, after a period of decline and comparative neglect, has, on the occasion of the Senefelder Centenary in 1898, received a new impetus.

Not the least fascinating chapter in Mr. and Mrs. Pennell's exhaustive volume on 'Lithography and Lithographers'* deals with the history of the inventor, Aloys Senefelder. It is the old story of the inventive genius, absorbed

* *Lithography and Lithographers*. By Joseph Pennell and E. Robins Pennell. (London: T. Fisher Unwin.)



THOMAS VIRELOQUE
BY GAVARNI

(T. Fisher Unwin.)

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in his experiments, enthusiastic, unbusinesslike, the prey of unscrupulous exploiters, who turn to account his ideas and inventions, and deck themselves with borrowed plumes, who thrive and prosper, whilst he is ever in financial difficulties and barely able to earn a precarious living.

Just as Columbus's attempts at finding a new route to the Indies resulted in the discovery of America, the existence of which had never been dreamt of by the bold explorer, Senefelder discovered lithography in trying to find an improved method of copperplate etching. He experienced considerable difficulties in writing backwards on the copper, and, for reasons of economy, used polished stone-slabs covered with etching ground for his experiments. 'I had just succeeded,' he says, 'in my little laboratory in polishing a stone plate, which I intended to cover with etching ground, in order to continue my exercises in writing backwards, when my mother entered the room, and desired me to write her bill for the washerwoman, who was waiting for the linen. I happened not to have even the smallest slip of paper at hand, as my little stock of paper had been entirely exhausted by taking proof impressions from the stone; nor was there even a drop of ink in the ink-stand. As the matter would not admit of delay, and we had nobody in the house to send for a supply of the deficient materials, I resolved to write the list with my ink prepared with wax, soap, and lampblack, on the stone which I had just polished, and from which I could copy it at leisure. Some time after this I was just going to wipe this writing from the stone, when the idea all at once struck me to try what would be the effect of such a writing with my prepared ink if I were to bite in the stone with aquafortis; and whether, perhaps, it might not be possible to apply printing ink to it in the same way as to wood engravings, and so take impressions from it.'

This was the preliminary step. He next reversed the method, and wrote with varnish on the stone, biting away with aquafortis the ground round the letters. The experiments were successful, but real lithography, as the term is now understood, was not invented until a few years later, in 1798. And, curiously enough, Senefelder's first lithographs were made by

means of transfer-paper, or, as it is now termed, by 'auto-lithography.' The inventor's real object was to find a kind of transfer-paper, on which he could write in the ordinary way, and thus overcome the difficulty of writing backwards. Only when he had succeeded in transferring his letters to the stone, the idea struck him that, if he could print from paper to stone, there should be no difficulty in reversing the method and taking paper impressions from the stone. Thus, in an indirect way, lithography was discovered.

The following chapters of Mr. Pennell's book are devoted to an excellent historical sketch of the development of the new art from its early beginnings to its great period about the middle of the nineteenth century, when Gavarni and Daumier achieved their greatest triumphs; to its decline, when it gradually ceased to be an independent method of artistic expression, and became merely a handmaiden of the other arts; and to its recent revival, all of which periods are excellently and profusely illustrated by carefully chosen reproductions or works by the greatest masters of the craft.

DECORATIVE FLOWER STUDIES.

THERE are two ways of looking at a flower: the botanist's and the artist's, or the idealist's and the realist's. Strangely enough it is the dry man of science who plays here the part of idealist, since, in his endeavour to reduce the flower drawing to a more or less symmetrical diagram, he is bound to arrive eventually at the ideal shape, freed from those little accidents of nature which, to the artist, are the real characteristics of the plant or flower.

The idea which led Mr. J. Foord in designing his flower studies* can be best explained in his own words:—

'While fully realising the necessity of structural accuracy, I have felt that the natural grace, delicacy and charm of a flower are also botanical facts, of equal importance with the number of its petals, or the order of the leaves

* *Decorative Flower Studies*, by J. Foord. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1901).